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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of 11 strategies designed to ease separation anxiety in preschool children. Subjects were 10 preschool children enrolled in a public school early childhood classroom for their first school experience. Each child was delayed in at least two of six developmental areas (social, emotional, cognitive, psychological, speech, physical, and cultural), and all subjects displayed behaviors related to severe separation anxiety. Children's behavior was measured by the Social Skills Checklist, and an anecdotal record of each child's behavior was maintained. Techniques used to alleviate separation anxiety included: (1) displaying photographs of the child's family; (2) informing children of their parents' location; (3) playing an audio tape of each child's parent reading a familiar story or singing a song; (4) encouraging children to build houses with building blocks and to pretend to come to school; (5) helping children plan for each day's departure; (6) encouraging children to take home classroom objects, which served as transitional objects; and (7) being sensitive to separation anxiety indicators, including crying, refusing to eat, and thumb-sucking. Upon completion of the 12-week implementation period, analysis revealed that all children separated from their parents had participated in the entire early childhood classroom routine, on a daily basis, without displaying separation anxiety behaviors. (MM)

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Developing Social Skills to Assist Developmentally Delayed Preschool Children in Overcoming Separation Anxiety in a Public School Setting

by

Phylistine Chambers-Murphy

Cluster 42

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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and

God, the creator of superlative wisdom, and the supreme being in my life.

ABSTRACT

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The 10 preschool children presented in this practicum were enrolled in a public school early childhood classroom for their first school experience. An examination of school records indicated that each child was delayed in at least two of six developmental areas. The uncontrollable cries of the children, who wanted to return home, made it impossible for them to participate in the preschool activities. The objective of the writer was to have the 10 children participate in class without displaying behaviors that were related to severe separation anxiety.

Eleven strategies to ease separation anxiety in the classrom and activities that included 22 age-appropriate objectives for social development were incorporated in the daily routine. The writer included parent participation as an approach that developed comfortable feelings during the initial weeks of the 10 young children's school experience.

Upon completion of the 12-week implementation period, analysis of the data revealed that each of the 10 children separated from the parent and participated in the entire early childhood classrom routine, on a daily basis, without displaying behaviors that were related to separation distress.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS....ii

ABSTRACT....iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS....iv

LIST OF TABLES....v

Chapter

I INTRODUCTION....1

Description of Work Setting and Community....1
Writer's Work Setting and Role....5

II STUDY OF THE PROBLEM....7

Problem Description....7
Problem Documentation....7
Causative Analysis....9
Relationship of the Problem to the Literature....9

III ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS....13

Goals....13
Expected Outcomes....13
Measurement Objectives....15

IV SOLUTION STRATEGY....17

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions....17
Description of Selected Solution....19
Report of Action Taken....21

V RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS....26

Results....26
Discussion....31
Recommendations....33
Dissemination....34

Page

REFERENCES.....35

APPENDICES

Social Skills Checklist.....37

List of Tables

Table

1 Preschool Students' Profile.....38

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The setting in which this practicum was performed is an elementary school in a large metropolitan area. Established in 1928, the school's community is one of the oldest in the city. The community's population was approximately 100,000 in 1920. The community's population has declined steadily since 1920, except for an increase during the 1940's which resulted from an influx of Black families (mostly from the southern states). The riots of the late 1960's destroyed many residential buildings and caused a loss of residents, shops and businesses. The population of the community declined to less than 9,000 residents in 1990. There is no community in the traditional sense. The community is badly fragmented because of the location of three main public housing units and the rivalry that exists between them. Representatives from each public housing unit are now making an effort to solve school and community problems.

The school was designed in 1960 to accommodate 1,365 students from kindergarten through sixth grade. The students were mainly residents of a nearby housing project. The school is located in a poverty stricken area of the inner-city. Several land clearance projects have caused demolitions in the area during the past years. Additional housing projects, a medical center and two expressways have been established on the land that was cleared.

The school currently provides a learning environment for approximately 548 students from the housing complex. The educational program now extends from prekindergarten through grade eight. A staff of approximately 50 professionals and paraprofessional cooperate with parents, students and other community members and organizations to develop and maintain an educational program that enables the students to realize academic and social potentials.

In addition to the basic curriculum of the school system, the school offers students preschool and full-day kindergarten classes, augmented class sizes through the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments, a General Equivalency Diploma Program (GED), and Intensive Improvement in Math and Reading (IMIP/IRIP). Extracurricular activities include mixed chorus, various sports teams and the color guard.

The school also serves special education students by providing these programs: Speech Therapy, Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH), Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD), Moderate Learning Disabilities (MLD) and Early Childhood Education of the Handicapped (ECEH).

Based on information from the Department of School Visits, during the 1988-89 school year, the local board of education informed the school that it was identified as one of the schools in the subdistrict that has the highest level of excellence in respect to maintenance, food service and safety-security. In recognition of this accomplishment the school was honored at the Annual Environmental Beautification Ceremony.

The school offers both a regular curriculum and funded programs which are instituted in order to meet the needs of the students. The regular curriculum provides instruction in Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Art, Music, Physical Education, Library Science and Health/Safety Education. Instruction in each subject area follows the guidelines as set forth by the city's public school system in regard to weekly time distribution, objectives that are expected to be met at each grade level, content to be taught as detailed in curriculum guides and evaluation procedures. Priority is given to the teaching of Language Arts and Mathematics with emphasis placed upon mastery of goals/objectives of the Comprehensive Reading Program and the Comprehensive Mathematics Program.

Regular education students who show a deficit of one or more years may also be considered to participate in the After-School Reading Program and Summer School Program which are instituted each year. Those students who have been identified as having "special needs" may also have access to such services/programs as provided through the Itinerant Speech Services, Itinerant Services for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired and Perceptual Motor Therapy Program.

The climate of the school is one of students and teachers working very hard to achieve certain goals that have been set. It is by no means a school without its share of controversial topics and disagreements on concepts or ideas. However, the school does work because the faculty and staff fully

realize that no matter how diverse their backgrounds or opinions are, ultimately all staff members must come to consensus for the good of the school and community.

Federally funded breakfast and lunch programs are carefully planned. This organization provides the children with guidelines for appropriate lunchroom behavior. Each classroom has a specific seating assignment in the lunchroom. Teachers, while eating with their children, have an opportunity to reinforce good table manners and appropriate conduct.

Teacher meetings are well structured and informative. The main purpose of the meetings is to make faculty and staff knowledgeable about school matters, as well as the planning of many activities. These meetings are open for discussions, questions and ideas on the topics presented.

Parent/community involvement is a very important part of the school's educational program. Many parents serve as classroom volunteers helping teachers and students in more ways than space permits to list. Parents also accompany teachers and students when field trips are taken.

The school is unique because regular classroom teachers and special education teachers work together to create a cohesive whole with the cooperation and participation of the parents. Through the maintenance of good rapport among teachers, students and the school community representatives, few incidents of vandalism, theft or damage to school and/or personal property are displayed by the students. Students exhibit a respect

for school and teachers. A positive atmosphere creates a feeling of well-being, allowing children to gain self-confidence and strive to do their best.

In spite of a drop in enrollment from a high of 1,400 pupils to the present low of 548 pupils, a positive atmosphere has been maintained. The deterioration of the housing projects has forced many parents to move out of the school district. However, many parents continue to send children to the school. Some of the parents are former students of the school.

Despite the low socio-economic development in the area that the school serves, teachers with tenure carry on a positive attitude by lending support to incoming teachers. The teachers work together to create a learning environment for students within the school to assist students in coping with realities outside of the school. The horror stories that exist at other inner-city schools do not exist at this school.

The bottom line is that the school is a not a typical inner-city school, but quite unique. This uniqueness arises from the faculty, staff, parents and students. All one has to do is to listen to the comments of visitors to know that the positive atmosphere is ongoing. The school has, is and will continue to be a very important part of the community in which it is located.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is an ECEH (Early Childhood Education of the Handicapped) teacher and the coordinator of the school's student transportation program. Children enrolled in the ECEH Program have disabilities of a social, emotional, mental or physical nature which can not always be defined because of the

preschoolers' ages (three to five years). The population of ECEH classrooms consist of a teacher and two assistants. The writer's teaching responsibilities are to provide activities and support that will establish optimum conditions for the students' maximum growth in areas of cognitive, physical, language, social/emotional and personal development.

In the role of School Transportation Coordinator, the writer is responsible for supervising the daily operation of the six school buses and 18 paraprofessionals involved in transporting students to and from the school building.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem presented in this practicum was the inability of 10 preschool children to become active participants in daily classroom routines. Upon arrival to the classroom, seven of the 10 children would cry and scream to return home. The children refused to be seated in the classroom and usually stood by the door and made shrieking sounds as they bawled. The children refused to accept comfort, toys or food from the classroom staff. Concisely, the 10 preschool children were incapable of participating in the classroom activities.

Problem Documentation

The 10 preschool students presented in this practicum were enrolled in the writer's classroom for their first school experience. An examination of school records indicated that each of the children was experiencing developmental delays in more than one of the following areas, (a) social, (b) emotional, (c) cognitive, (d) psychological, (e) speech/language, (f) physical and (g) cultural. Each of the 10 children was also considered to be economically at risk because of the location of the school and the poor living conditions of the families.

Table 1 capitulates information collected in reference to each of the 10 preschool children.

TABLE 1

Preschool Students' Profile

Student	Sex[a]	Chronological Age	Developmental Age	Developmental Delays[b]
A	M	3 years	2 years	C, SP, S
B	M	3 years	2 years	C, SP
C	M	3 years	18 months	C, SP, S
D	F	3 years	20 months	C, SP, S
E	F	4 years	2 years	C, SP
F	M	4 years	3 years	C, E
G	M	4 years	3 years	C, SP
H	F	4 years	18 months	C, SP, S
I	F	5 years	3 years	C, P
J	F	5 years	2 years	C, SP, P

[a] M-Male; F-Female
[b] S-Social; SP-Speech; C-Cognitive
E-Emotional; CL-Cultural; P-Physical

As represented by the data in Table 1, each of the 10 children showed a difference between chronological age and developmental age.

Written observations taken in the classroom for a three-week period documented that each of the 10 children cried to return home with a parent. Seven of the 10 children cried each day. Interpretation of the observations indicated that some of the children's crying was a result of witnessing the anxiety of their classmates.

One hour was the minimum amount of time that the children would cry upon arrival to the classroom. The crying preschoolers would not respond to the classroom staff.

Causative Analysis

Examination by the writer of social history reports and parent conferences indicated several factors which contributed to the young children's anxiety in the classroom. The parent conference notes indicated that the preschool children had little or no opportunity for socialization outside the home while six of the 10 children were only given an opportunity to socialize with their peers.

The social history reports gave evidence that the parents did not take the children outside of the home due to a fear of the violence in the area around the housing projects (shooting and robberies) and the poor conditions of the building and corridors (poor lighting and broken elevators). The preschool children were unable to adjust to the new and strange classroom environment. The children had been taught by their mothers to avoid contact with strangers; therefore, the preschoolers refused the advances of the classroom staff.

Relationship of Problem to Literature

Several causes of the problem of separation anxiety in the early childhood public school classroom setting were documented in the literature. Bailey (1988) suggested that many childhood professionals fail to demonstrate an understanding of the separation process from a psychoanalytic perspective.

According to Bailey, early childhood professionals must keep in mind the four stages of the separation/individuation process when working with young children who are confronted with issues of separation anxiety in the classroom setting. Bailey identified the four stages of the separation/individuation process as differentiation, practicing physical separation while retaining a psychological connection, low-keyedness and rapproachment.

Bailey defined the four stages. Differentiation is the process of separating mom and me (we) from other people and objects. The state of differentiation usually occurs in children six to nine months of age and is observable as infants pull at their mother's hair, facial parts, or eyeglasses. At this stage the infant is beginning to differentiate "I" from "we" (p. 5).

The second stage "practicing phase" occurs when the child can move away from the mother. The goal of the second stage is for the child to obtain physical separation. However, the child constantly visually and physically returns to the mother to reinforce the strong psychological connection to her (p. 7).

During stage three, "low-keyedness and transition objects," the young child may discover that the mother has left the room and redirect his/her focus to inward images of the mother. The child may elicit a safe feeling by transferring his/her attention to a transition object such as a blanket or a toy from home (p. 8).

The final stage of separation/individuation process is rapproachment. At this stage the young child is able to separate the "I" from the "we." The child is

happy and pleased with his/her ability to explore the world and also recognizes his/her dependency on the mother. The child at this stage is in a definite dilemna - the desire to be a separate self and the desire to be close and safe with mom. During this stage the child exhibits fear in clinging behavior and anger is exhibited in "pushing away" behavior (p. 9).

Gottschall (1989) contended that the separation process is a long and painful process for teachers, parents and children; therefore, the desire to "get over" the separation process rapidly and efficiently is a natural reaction of teachers. According to Gottschall, children who have experienced time away from their mothers have an easier transition to the classroom setting than children who have had no experiences away from their mothers. Gottschall revealed that many children who suffer from separation anxiety think that they have been sent to school, put out, for something they have done. In addition to crying, these children display their anxiety through silence, "acting-up," symbolic play and use of transitional objects.

Many parents and teachers deal with the separation anxiety issue by sneaking away or avoiding the child. Adams and Passman (1981) discussed the complex issue of the mothers' role in alleviating separation distress in young children. These authors contended that advice given to mothers has been intuitively rather than empirically focused which leads to contradictory recommendations. Some educators advise parents to prepare young children for separation by long explanations and gradual departures; other educators recommend that gradual departures be avoided. Adams and Passman's study

revealed that two-year-olds who did not receive preparation at home were able to play in a separation situation without showing distress longer than children who had been warned in advance. This study concluded for Adams and Passman that excessive preparation before separation may have an adverse effect on the child.

Moreover, Lollis (1990) addressed the interaction between mother and child prior to separation as an important factor in the behavior of young children. The results of Lollis' research implied that boys have a more difficult time with separation anxiety than do girls.

Allen (1982) described "egocentrism" according to Piaget. Young children think that they will experience exactly what is happening to another child. Therefore, young children become concerned when their peers display signs of distress.

The literature that was related to separation and young children indicated that separation anxiety or distress is a progressive developmental stage that all children experience. However, some children have a very difficult time while other children ease through this period.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals

The following goal and expected outcomes were projected for this practicum. The goal of the practicum was to assist 10 developmentally delayed preschool children in coping with issues which were related to separation and attachment by helping them to develop social skills in a public school early childhood classroom setting.

Specifically, the objective of the writer was to have all 10 children actively or passively participate in the entire early childhood classroom routine on a daily basis without displaying behaviors which were related to separation distress.

Expected Outcomes

Upon completion of the 12-week implementation period for this practicum, the 10 children who were enrolled in the early childhood classroom routinely participated in singing songs, listening to and telling stories, reciting fingerplays, and other language development activities for the first half-hour of each school day without showing signs of distress due to being away from their mothers or primary caregivers.

The 10 children spent an additional hour of each day engaged in self-directed play activities such as using the sand and water tables, building with blocks and manipulating fine motor toys, and participating in teacher-directed group activities such as dramatic play, simple games, playing rhythm

instruments to music and large motor activities. Each of the children exhibited mastery of at least 11 of the 22 objectives from the Social Skills Checklist.

An adaptation of Balaban's theory (Chapter IV) was implemented and assisted in establishing trust and self-confidence in the preschool children. Balaban (1988) offered many suggestions and techniques which help children feel confident about separating. The following techniques were adopted by the writer:

1. Photographs of each child's family were displayed in the cubby or on a low wall for easy viewing.
2. An audio tape of each child's parent reading a familiar story or singing a song was recorded and made available to the children.
3. The children were informed of their parents location and assured that the parents would return.
4. The children dictated audiotaped messages and drew pictures for their parents.
5. The children were encouraged to use building blocks to build houses and pretend to come to school.
6. Each child was given as much control as possible in as many situations as possible; e.g., peas or potatoes? paint or play dough?

7. The staff helped the children plan for each day's departure.
8. The children were encouraged to take objects home, from the classroom, that served as a transitional object.
9. The staff was sensitive to the following separation anxiety indicators: (a) crying, (b) refusing to eat, (c) aggression toward children or teachers, (d) increased thumb-sucking or wetting, (e) shadowing the teacher, (f) inability to make friends or (g) silence or refusal to speak.

Measurement of Outcomes

The mastery of the objectives was measured using the Social Skills Checklist (see Appendix) and an anecdotal record that were maintained for each of the 10 children. The Social Skills Checklist contains 22 observable behaviors and social skills. The Social Skills Checklist focuses on indications of (a) preschool readiness, (b) sociability, (c) emotional maturity, (d) aggressiveness, and (e) dependency. The Social Skills Checklist was designed by the writer to avoid the dependence on memory and serve as an efficient recording procedure. The writer observed the children on a daily basis and recorded the date that the children mastered specific social skills. At the end of the implementation period, "not mastered" was written for objectives which the children did not show mastery.

An anecdotal record was completed weekly for each of the 10 children and anytime the writer observed behavior that was relevant to the practicum. An

anecdotal record is an informal report of teacher observation. It was used by the writer to provide an informal and largely qualitative picture of the children's behaviors that were not listed on the Social Skills Checklist. The anecdotal record incorporated the following features:

1. It described the settings sufficiently to give the incidents meaning.
2. It included capacity for interpretation or evaluation by the observer (the interpretation was distinguished from the description by use of multi-colored pens).
3. The incidents it describes related to the child's personal development or social interactions.
4. The incidents it describes were either representative of the child's typical behavior or significant because it was unlike his usual form of behavior. If it was unusual behavior for the child, the fact was documented.

A log was used to record daily, weekly and monthly events which were relevant to the entire group of children. The log was also used as a source for written narratives which described the classroom climate as the children's social skills were developing.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem in this practicum was to assist the developmentally delayed preschool children in coping with issues which were related to separation and attachment by assisting them in the development of social skills in a public school early childhood classroom setting. In addition, the writer sought to have the 10 children actively or passively participate in the total early childhood classroom routine on a daily basis without displaying behaviors which were related to separation anxiety.

The literature suggested several approaches that could be successfully applied in easing the distress of separation anxiety for children, teachers and parents.

According to Allen (1982) a well-planned initial visit developed good rapport with child and caregiver and an interest for the child to return to the classroom. He suggested that the classroom teacher use the initial visit to introduce the child to the school environment. He also stressed the importance of the teacher interacting with the parent as well as the child during the initial visit. The parent should never, except on rare occasions, play with school toys with the child; this defeats the underlying purpose which is to help children learn that teachers are to help children have a good time at school with the attractive school toys. Home is where parents help children to have a good time with home toys (p. 7). Allen placed emphasis on the

importance for teachers to help children learn each other's names and suggested the following methods for use during the school day:

1. During the early days and weeks, conversation at snack time should include talk about names.
2. Name guessing games (where the answer is obvious) can be played.
3. Music time provides innumerable opportunities for using the children's names in songs.
4. While writing a child's name on a painting, the teacher can read the name aloud (p 15).

Allen concluded the article by explaining the significance of using the same arrangements made for children at the beginning of the school year for new children enrolling in the class during the school year. Bailey (1988) advised caregivers to validate the feelings of both parents and child, step in and help parents and children separate, stay with the child in a close relationship and help to continue the individuation process. Bailey also maintained that the teacher's understanding of psychological separation which allow for low-keyed behaviors, transition objects and private space is essential for a successful early childhood program. Supporting low-keyed behaviors developed the "I" by allowing the child to privately meet his/her own needs (p. 8).

Adams and Passman (1981) implied that parents prepare their preschool children prior to separation. However, they warned parents to use precaution

when talking to the child about separation. Parents who are ambivalent about leaving tend to use lengthy preparations which distress the child. The study revealed that in some situations information about the caretaker with whom the child is to be left is more beneficial to the child than information about the mother's departure (p. 1070).

Gottschall (1989) seemed to be in agreement with Adams and Passman's (1981) study when she suggested that children could be "innoculated" against anxiety by explaining what to expect to preschoolers. Prior knowledge gives preschoolers a sense of predictability and control that eases separation distress (p. 12). Gottschall offered "play" as a natural way of turning distress to interest. Games such as peek-a-boo assure children that things (toys, mothers, etc.) that go away reappear. Gottschall also advocated the use of blankets and other transitional objects from home for the distressed preschool child's visual and tactile comfort.

Description of Selected Solution

On the basis of the bibliographic research, the writer was convinced that the development and implementation of a program incorporating an adaptation of Balaban's theory (as described in Chapter III) which established trust and self-confidence in preschool children would help to ease separation anxiety.

Photographs of each child's family were posted on a low wall so that a child had an opportunity to see his/her family when the need arose.

An audio cassette was made for each child with the child's mother or family member singing a familiar song to the child. The children were encouraged to use the classroom tape recorder to listen to the songs or record songs and messages for the parents to hear. The teacher informed the students, daily, where their parents were, i.e., "Your mom went shopping today, she will come back after we eat lunch" or "Your mom is at school today, she will be here after we eat our snack and sing our goodbye song."

The preschool children were encouraged to draw pictures and dictate letters to their mothers. The mothers were encouraged to write back and teacher assistants would read the responses to the children.

In block play, the children were encouraged to build their apartment building and pretend to come to school. The children were given as much control as possible in as many situations as possible: (a) do you want mashed potatoes or peas?, (b) do you want to paint or play with sand?, and (c) do you want to hear this story or that one?

The children were encouraged to bring transitional objects from home. Eventually, the children were able to talk about and share the transitional objects in a show and tell activity. The teacher assistants read stories about starting school, separations, friendships and saying goodbye to the children. The children were encouraged to talk about ideas and feelings. The classroom staff was inserviced by the writer on the theories of attachment, bonding and separation and were always aware of signs of separation distress such as:

crying, refusal to eat, aggression toward children and teachers, increase thumbsucking or wetting, shadowing the teachers, silence or refusal to speak.

Parents were involved in the transition from home to the public school early childhood classroom. The parents were not allowed to leave abruptly or sneak away. Balaban argued that these techniques teach young children that adults cannot be trusted.

Parents were given the classroom telephone number and encouraged to surprise the children with a brief, "Hello, how are you, I'll see you in a little while." The children were encouraged to participate in saying good-bye. Balaban (1988) contended that hugging, kissing, crying, waving at the window or door and saying "I'll miss you," are all ways of getting feelings out in the open (p. 9).

The writer's solution strategy incorporated Balaban's methods for assisting young children in developing comfortable feelings with reference to issues involving separation and mastery of the 22 objectives which appear on the Social Skills Checklist. Balaban's approach was significant because it was created for an early childhood education classroom setting.

Report of Action Taken

A summary of the action taken in implementing the plans and strategies designed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the practicum follows.

The first week of implementation included opportunities for the children to visit the classroom with parents. The parent visitations were essential in granting favorable circumstances for the bonding of the classroom staff with

the parents and children. The preschool children and parents were welcomed to the classroom by the school's principal, counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse and classroom staff. Each of the 10 parents was interviewed by the school social worker in the presence of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher documented information about each child that would assist the classroom staff, i.e., toileting, temperment, allergies, etc.

The parents were encouraged to accompany the children in the classroom and participate in the daily routine for the remainder of the first month. Eight of the 10 parents accompanied their children in the classroom at least three days a week. The parents were directed to prepare the children for separation when it was necessary for the parent to be away from the classroom. It became a standard procedure for a parent to announce, "I can't stay here today because I have to go to the doctor; I'll come back for you after lunch" or "I'll have to leave for a little while," I'll see you before music time." When necessary, the classroom staff and other parents would remind a curious child about the missing parent's whereabouts and return time. The children seemed to understand that the parents had to leave the classroom because they cried less.

The preschool children were permitted to explore the classroom and to choose classroom toys for entertainment. During the first month, the children began to leave their mothers to explore the classroom and to participate in unstructured, parallel play such as playing in the water/sand table, constructing towers with building blocks and finger painting with pudding.

Photographs were taken of each of the 10 children engaged in a classroom activity with the parent and of the parents individually at the end of the first month. The classroom staff placed the photographs on the classroom walls where they could be easily viewed by the children (not higher than three feet). Each of the 10 children was given an audio recording of the parent singing and reading to the child. The 10 children were taken on a school tour to visit the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. The children enjoyed the visit to the kindergarten classroom and invited the kindergarten students to the preschool classroom for an ice cream social.

The parents were instructed by the teacher to make visits to the classroom less frequent; however, each parent was reminded to continue to report her itinerary to the child when necessary. The parents were permitted to send transitional objects such as stuffed toys or pictures of siblings from home to the classroom. One of the 10 children was given transitional objects to bring from home. However, the children were permitted to borrow classroom materials for use at home over the weekends. Each of the children borrowed a toy or book on Fridays and returned them on Mondays.

The second month of implementation was exciting for the classroom staff and children. The major emphasis was placed on classroom routines and documentation of the children's social skills and behaviors. The two teacher assistants were present in the classroom at all times with the children. The teacher assistants talked with the children regarding the parents only when a child initiated an inquiry.

The children showed evidence that they were learning the classroom routine by singing early childhood transition songs such as, "Good Morning," "Playtime Is Over," "Storytime Is Here," and "Goodbye, Goodbye." The children learned to return classroom toys and materials to the proper places in the classroom. Classroom duties were assigned to the children around the middle of the second month. The children voluntarily accepted responsibilites for classroom jobs such as (a) watering plants, (b) feeding the fish, (c) distributing and collecting art supplies, (d) setting table for snacks, (e) giving the wasterpaper basket to the school janitor, and (f) welcoming classroom visitors.

During the first half of the implementation, documentation was quite tedious as the writer attempted to record information while interacting with the children. The writer modified the procedure by using a teaching assistant to observe and record naturalistic observations. Also, anecdotal records were written by the classroom staff regarding classroom climate and interpretation/evaluation of each day's events. This duty rotated between the staff members daily. By the end of the second month, not one of the 10 children was querying the classroom staff about parents. The children learned new songs and began recording songs and stories on their personal audio tapes. The children also evidenced increased attention span by sitting and listening to stories for longer periods of time.

During the final four weeks, all 10 children were comfortable in the public school setting and showed no observable indications of separation anxiety. The children arrived each day ready to participate on the daily routine. Each

child initiated conversation or engaged at least one other child in play. The classroom staff encouraged the children to select activities. The classroom staff continued to document written observations and recorded the children's progress on the Social Skills Checklists.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The problem that was presented from the writer's work setting was the inability of 10 developmentally delayed preschool children to participate in the daily classroom routine without screaming for the parents during the entire class period. The writer's goal was to assist 10 preschool children in coping with issues which were related to separation and attachment by helping them to develop social skills in a public school early childhood classroom setting. Specifically, the objective of the writer was to have all 10 children actively or passively participate in the entire early childhood classroom routine on a daily basis without displaying behaviors which were related to separation distress. The writer's bibliographic research of the problem revealed that the development and implementation of a program adopted from Balaban's approach to separation would be the most appropriate solution. It should be noted that the successful results of this project must be attributed to the exceptional cooperation of the parents and the hard work of the teaching assistants as well as the strategies implemented. The following results exceeded the writer's expectation.

The first recommendation offered by Balaban was to post photographs of each child's family on a low wall. The writer observed that all 10 of the children routinely referred to the photographs. The 10 children were also able to identify their classmates' parents when they visited the classroom. All of

the children were able to point to the photographs and provide appropriate responses to the question, "Whose mom is this?" One of the children was diagnosed with elective mutism. This non-verbal child participated in the photograph activity by pointing to the appropriate child.

The technique of using an audio tape of each child's parent reading a story or singing a song was not popular. The children were not interested in listening to their parents on a tape recorder. However, all 10 of the children habitually used the tape recorder to talk and listen to their own voices.

The procedure of informing the children of the parents' whereabouts was most successful for the 10 children. On one occasion, one child was observed reassuring a classmate that her mom was at the beauty salon "for a minute." Three parents telephoned the classroom occasionally to announce changes in their schedules that would necessitate late departures for the children.

Balaban's fourth course of action was to have the children draw pictures for their parents and make an audio recording of the child telling the parents about the picture. The 10 children actively participated in painting and drawing pictures; however, none of them could stick to the task of telling about their pictures. All of the 10 children preferred to sing, make funny sounds, giggle or push the button on the tape recorder.

The fifth method involved using building blocks to build a house and pretending to come to school. The 10 children were successful at using the colorful blocks to build tall towers to knock down. The children were not able to build a house with the blocks and leave it standing long enough for a

dramatic play activity. On several occuasions, five of the 10 children were observed in the doll corner wearing dramatic play clothing and pretending to get ready for school.

The sixth approach suggested by Balaban was to develop the children's decision-making ability. The 10 children were occasionally presented with two or three activities and asked to choose one. When this concept was initially introduced, seven of the 10 children would select the same activity that the first child selected. By the end of the last week of the 12-week implementation, seven of the 10 children were selecting their favorite activities when given an opportunity to choose.

Pursuant to Balaban's seventh suggestion, the classroom staff helped the children plan for each day's departure and utilized the last 10 minutes of each day to sing the goodbye song, talk about school bus and traffic safety, recall the day's activities and preview a fun activitiy that was scheduled for the following day.

The eighth idea presented by Balaban was to encourage the parents to send a transitional object to school with the child. One of the 10 children brought a stuffed toy to school. As a result of this idea, the classroom staff developed a successful lending library that provided classroom materials for parents to borrow for use with the children on weekends and holidays. All 10 children participated in the lending program.

Balaban's ninth and final suggestion was for classroom teachers to become sensitive with behaviors that may indicate separation anxiety in young

children. The writer and teaching assistants paid close attention to changes in each of the children's behaviors and temperment. The classroom staff focused on an increase in the following behaviors as a red flag of possible indication of separation anxiety: (a) crying, (b) change in eating pattern, (c) aggression toward classmates and staff persons, (d) increased thumb-sucking, (e) wetting, (f) shadowing the classroom staff, (g) inability to make friends and (h) silence or refusal to speak. Not one of the 10 children displayed observable signs that were related to separation anxiety by the end of the 12-week implementation period. The following results were derived from the information that was accumulated from each of the 10 children's Social Skills Checklist.

By the end of the 12-week implementation, the 10 children achieved mastery of a majority of the 22 given objectives on the Social Skills Checklist. Each of the 10 children was able to successfully separate from the parent. Every child in the classroom exhibited the ability to accept guidance from the classroom staff. The 10 students individually evidenced the ability to follow routines. Only seven of the 10 children mastered the ability to act independently. The remaining three children needed to be encouraged to join the class in activities, i.e., go to the toilet, participate in large-group activities or share and take turns. Engaging in pretend play was demonstrated by each of the 10 children. All of the children were comfortable when they participated in small group activities; however, only six of the 10 children actively participated in large groups. The four children who did not master large-group participation refused to perform before the large group. Ironically, these same

four children would perform (stand before a group and say hello) in groups of five or fewer. Only four the the 10 children would readily share toys or take turns playing with them. None of the 10 children hesitated to ask a classroom teacher for help The entire class dutifully helped with the simple classroom chores. Even though three of the children were very shy, all 10 children were developing self-esteem. Every child demonstrated pride in accomplishments by displaying work or by simply taking and telling classmates and teachers. Three of the 10 children responded to the needs of peers as they assisted with buttons and zippers or comforted friends who were sad.

Not one of the children was proficient in solving individual social problems. The classroom staff had to respond constantly to complaints such as "He hit me," "She screamed in my face," and "He said, he won't play with me." Nine of the 10 children openly expressed their feelings in words and the child diagnosed as an elective mute was observed in a corner of the classroom arguing with another child over a toy truck. When the teaching assistant walked closer to investigate, the elective mute child refused to speak again. The 10 children acquired friends in the classroom. The friendships were evidenced by the children as they held hands, hugged each other, chose the same play partner or openly exclaimed, "(name) is my friend." The same seven children displayed mastery in showing initiative that acquired the ability to act independently. Due to the developmental ages of the children and short attention spans, only five of the 10 children could successfully remain with an activity to completion. All 10 of the children were able to pay attention to a

story for about seven minutes. Six of the 10 children successfully engaged in cooperative play, the remaining four engaged in parallel play. Eight of the children were close to playing simple games with rules, i.e., duck-goose, relay race and Bozo's Grand Prize Game. All 10 children were observed imitating a basketball game using a foam rubber ball and a toy basketball hoop.

Discussion

The writer's expected outcomes were met. At the start of the implementation period, the writer was concerned that 12 weeks would not provide sufficient time for the 10 children to (a) participate in the classroom activities without showing signs of distress and (b) interact sociably with their peers. The expected outcomes exceeded the writer's expectation in reference to the time frame of the implementation period. The writer expected that the outcomes would be successfully mastered by the end (last day of the last week) of the 12-week implementation period. The writer was prepared for a long and painful separation process. To the writer's astonishment, the 10 children exhibited social skills that were appropriate for their developmental age and participated in the daily classroom routines by the beginning of the ninth week of implementation. The writer attributed this unexpected success to the cooperation of the 10 parents and the teaching assistants. Allen stressed the importance of the teacher interacting with the parents as well as the child during the initial visits to the classroom.

The most successful strategy was to insist that the 10 parents explain their comings and goings to the young children. Bailey advised that classroom

staff "step in" and help parents and children separate. Adams and Passman reported that prior knowledge gives young children a sense of predictability and control that eases distress due to separation. Gottschall endorsed this idea and advocated that parents and teachers "innoculate" children against anxiety by explaining what to expect.

The unanticipated outcomes of the practicum were rewarding and beneficial to the writer and to the continued development of the 10 children involved. The school psychologist returned to the classroom during the twelveth week of implementation to observe each of the 10 children. The psychologist's report summarized increases of between three months and one year in the social development of the children. The writer credited the significant increase in the children's social development to their mastery of the objectives on the Social Skills Checklist.

A second unanticipated outcome was that the teaching assistants became empowered by the goal of the practicum. The teaching assistants were excited by weekly gains that were made by the children. As a result, the writer instituted weekly team meetings which gave the classroom staff an opportunity to discuss each child's progress. The purpose of the team meetings was to interpret observational notes and make individual education plans for each of the 10 children. The writer noticed improvements in the attendance and morale of the two teaching assistants. Including the teacher assistants in the planning phase of this practicum enhanced their working relationship with the classroom teacher. Both teaching assistants expressed a desire to learn more

about young children and an interest in furthering their education to become classroom teachers.

The outcomes that stemmed from this practicum were rewarding for all involved; however, it is the writer's belief that the 10 children were the greatest benefactors.

Recommendations

The following two technology-based recommendations are appropriate to further promote successful solutions of this practicum:

1. The use of a video cam-corder, as a means for parents and children to communicate, afford preschool children opportunities to see their parents in action. A parent can sing a finger song and incorporate movements that can be seen by the child. Adding motion to the visual will give preschool children an opportunity to connect with their parents in a sensory sensitive manner when they are physically separated.

2. The video cam-corder can also be used as an observational tool in the classroom. Observing and recording children's behavior is a tedious task for the classroom teacher who has to simultaneously interact with preschool children. This twentieth century approach to naturalistic observation would provide the classroom teachers with an accurate permanent record of the children's behaviors in a complete form. These visual records can then be analyzed at a later date.

Dissemination

The successful accomplishments of this practicum were shared with the school principal, the local school council and with the writer's fellow colleagues. The writer was commended by the principal on the achievements of this practicum. Preliminary plans have been made for the writer to present this practicum at a staff development inservice. The hope is to encourage teachers, from other disciplines, to take a look at the "practicum approach to problem-solving" and determine if it has uses in other classroom settings.

This practicum will be submitted to the city public school system to provide information to other early childhood educators. The writer looks forward to refining these strategies and using them in future early childhood classrooms.

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APPENDICES

SOCIAL SKILLS CHECKLIST

SOCIAL SKILLS CHECKLIST

NAME _____ BIRTH DATE _____

Objective		Mastery Date
1.	Separates from parent	_____
2.	Accepts teacher guidelines	_____
3.	Follows routines	_____
4.	Acts independently	_____
5.	Engages in pretend play	_____
6.	Participates in small groups	_____
7.	Participates in large groups	_____
8.	Shares and takes turns	_____
9.	Asks for help	_____
10.	Helps with simple chores	_____
11.	Feels good about self	_____
12.	Show pride in accomplishments	_____
13.	Responds to needs of others	_____
14.	Solves social problems	_____
15.	Expresses feelings in words	_____
16.	Makes friends	_____
17.	Engages in cooperative play	_____
18.	Shows initiative	_____
19.	Remains with an activity	_____
20.	Assumes responsibility	_____
21.	Pays attention	_____
22.	Plays games with rules	_____